

June 7, 2022

Fellow Town Meeting Members:

Please find the attached letter from Don Mills for your consideration. His attachment also includes their initial powerpoint show to the CPAC Committee. Thank you,

Clarissa Rowe, Chair, Community Preservation Act Committee, Town Meeting member Precinct 4



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An Open Letter to  
**Arlington Town Meeting Members**  
In Reference to  
**Article 62 / COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT**

During debate on Article 62 at the 2022 Town Meeting, some questions were raised about funding a church in the historic preservation category. After the 14 CPA projects were approved by over 88% of the vote, multiple notices of reconsideration were given for Article 62. As noted by the Moderator, motions for reconsideration will be entertained if time permits following disposition of all remaining warrant articles. While waiting for reconsideration of Article 62, Covenant Church respectfully submits the following information to all TMM to clarify the nature of this funding request.

**Appropriate? / COMMUNITY Preservation Act**

This project supports Arlington Master Plan's vision to create civic connections that encourage social interaction and foster a sense of community while being good stewards of our historic heritage. As noted by the Town Manager's support letter, *"This grant request is in direct alignment with current goals and programmatic undertakings of various Town departments in regard to the accessibility and inclusivity of public spaces throughout Town."* Churches are, by their inherent nature, public buildings focused on serving the needs of local communities and standing as visual landmarks defining a sense of place. Covenant Church's mission includes finding creative ways to love our neighbors by hosting community meetings, maintaining a beautiful garden in Downing Square, collecting food for Arlington Eats, serving the elderly and supporting those in need regardless of any person's religious interest or affiliation.

Providing accessible improvements that serve those with mobility challenges will expand the church's ability to be better neighbors in the community. When hosting the Housing Corporation of Arlington's ribbon cutting recently for the Downing Square project, several Town officials experienced our hospitable efforts to accommodate facility challenges by live streaming the ceremony within the facility and via Zoom, allowing more speakers to contribute to the celebration. In the recent past, a meeting of the ArCS Cluster (Arlington, Cambridge, Somerville) of RIM (an interfaith "Refugee Integration Ministry") could not be hosted at Covenant Church as offered because a key participant needed wheelchair access.

The purpose of requesting CPA funding for constructing an accessible entrance and restroom is intended as a partnership with the Town to reinforce efforts of Covenant Church to become better neighbors in service to the community and in keeping with Arlington's Goals as summarized below.

- ◇ **ARTICLE 1: Community & Citizen Service / people helping others**
- ◇ **ARTICLE 2: Diversity / mix of religious backgrounds extending warm welcome**
- ◇ **ARTICLE 3: Education / providing all ages with opportunities for growth**
- ◇ **ARTICLE 4: The Environment / physical beauty, natural habits, well being**
- ◇ **ARTICLE 5: Culture & Recreation / treasuring & preserving historic resources**
- ◇ **ARTICLE 6: Communication / opportunities that bind us together**

We encourage you to see more information and support letters in our [CPAC Full Application](#) and the [slide presentation](#) given to the Community Preservation Act Committee during their due diligence reviews prior to determining which projects would be recommended to the 2022 Town Meeting.

**Historic? / Community PRESERVATION Act**

Covenant Church owns and occupies the 1899 Arlington Heights Baptist Church, cornerstone of the Mount Gilboa / Crescent Hill Historic District. According to the online historic resources database of the [Massachusetts Historical Commission](#), construction of this Queen Anne church represented the “solidification of the growing community of western Arlington.” In 1909, the original structure was raised up one story by construction of a new ground floor level, and in 1954 a three-story education wing was added to the north side to accommodate post-WWII population growth. The facility has housed an elementary school since 1996 that co-exists with the neighborhood church use. *The CPA accessibility project was presented to, reviewed by, and unanimously approved by the Arlington Historic District Commissions and the Arlington Disability Commission.*

**Legal? / Community Preservation ACT**

It is understandable that questions about the legality of using public funds for a church, or for any religious building, would be raised by TMM. When the CPAC received the preliminary application for this project, the first step they took was to forward it to Town Counsel for a thorough review. In a five-page memo from Douglas Heim to James Feeney, the legal conclusion was that CPAC assistance for an accessible entrance and restroom at Covenant Church is in keeping with the intentions of CPA funding and that the CPAC could consider the application. *Covenant Church’s proposed accessibility project was unanimously approved by the Arlington Community Preservation Act Committee.*

Respectfully Submitted By,

**COVENANT CHURCH**  
9 Westminster Avenue

On Behalf of Applicant,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Don Mills', with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.

Don Mills  
33 Bow Street